

**Toronto Telegram, September 1, 1934**  
**Schooner Days CLIV (154)**  
**By C.H.J. Snider**

## **FIRST INTO PORT**

Our worthy Harbor Commission has joined the great company of centennial year celebrants with a publication which does its compilers and the city and harbor great credit. It is known as "The Port and Harbor of Toronto, 1834-1934." Brig.-Gen. J. G. Langton, general manager of the Harbor Board, has, in this, made a valuable contribution to Toronto. Citizens are also grateful to the board's librarian, Mr. V. M. Roberts, whose patient accuracy in research and the collection of records shines through the product.

It will be news to most that the Port of Toronto dates as far back as the old French fort, that is, 1749. It is possible and probable that it was used by the early craft before that, for Father Hennepin speaks of putting into the mouth of the Humber, on the way to Niagara, in the preceding century.

But "in this year (1749) the first commercial cargo arrived at what is now the Port of Toronto," says the centennial book. "It was carried by a French armed vessel of about fifty tons and consisted of trade goods and supplies consigned to M. Varran, the keeper of Fort Rouille."

Now we have 59 steamship lines operating in and out of the port, and last year 2,428 vessels brought in 2,500,100 tons of cargo.

What was the name of this "first arrival," which deserved, but did not get, the harbor master's hat?

The French had, in 1749, the schooner *Huzalt*, of 50 tons, built that year at Fort Frontenac, and the brigantines *St. Francis* and *St. Gabriel*, built at the same place in 1741. It would be gratifying to find that Gabriel, who, presumably will be first up on the resurrection morn, was also first into the port of Toronto. But we may have to wait until then to find out.

This harbor master's hat is an ancient tile, annually awarded to the skipper who first brings a laden vessel into our port. He dons the lid, looks



*CAPT. F.J. MARIGOLD, steamer Dalhousie City, winner of 1926, wearing the famous harbormaster's hat. This one, originally owned by Capt. John Mead, of Mead's Island, dates from 1875. The first is said to have been presented by Capt. Hugh Richardson in 1854.*

proud, gets photographed, puts on his own hat again and goes uptown to buy another with the cheque the harbor master gives him: a fine old Toronto custom of eighty years' standing, copied extensively by other ports.

How the old names ring in the memory! Mr. Roberts' arrival records go back to 1868, when the Oakville schooner *Smith and Post* won the hat on April 2nd. The *Smith and Post* was named for the firm of grain and lumber exporters who owned her. The harbor was open that year until December 10th, when the scow *Ionia*, of Port Nelson, sailed in with the last load of cordwood.

In 1869 the old *Highland Chief*, which later came to grief at the Eastern Gap, opened navigation here on April 9th. The schooner *Primrose* closed it on December 13th.

In 1870 the schooner *J.G. Beard*, a fine vessel – she had, by the way, an Indian figurehead – owned by the mayor of Toronto, whose name she bore, arrived on March 31st. The stonehooker *Mary Ann* was last in, two days before Christmas. *Mary Ann* was the first arrival of the season five years later, opening navigation on April 15th, 1875 – for a long period. The scow *Ionia* was again the last arrival that season, coming in on January 8th, 1876.

The schooner *Meteor* was the first in. on March 27th, 1871, and the schooner *E. Hall* the last, on December 15th. Navigation opened next year with the schooner *Storey* arriving on March 18th. It closed with the steamer *Canada's* arrival December 9th.

On April 2nd, 1873, the schooner *Minnie Proctor*, known long afterwards as the *Snowbird*, was first into port for the season. The schooner *A. H. Moss* was the last arrival, on December 2nd.

The *Lone Star*, of Port Credit, recently rebuilt from the hull of the schooner *Hunter*, arrived on March 21st, 1874, and the stonehooker *Coral*, of Oakville, then new, closed the season on December 23rd; a cold date to be delivering lake shore stone.

The arrival of the stonehooker *Ionia* on January 8th, 1876, was only the closing of the 1875 season; the Port Credit schooner scow, *Minnie Blakely*, inaugurated Toronto navigation for 1876 by arriving on April 13th. The season ended with the tug *Mollie Spence* bringing in two barges December 18th.

Early among arrivals stands schooner *Friendship*, entering on March 1st, 1877, with the scow *Morning Star* closing 308 days of navigation by arriving January 2nd, 1878; the port's best record.

Next year the small schooner *Jenny Lind* arrived on March 7th and the *Lone Star* was back again as the last ship in, on December 10th.

In 1879 our blunt-nosed friend, the *Mary Ann*, came in on St. Patrick's Day, and the schooner *Belle Sheridan* – lost with all hands but one the following year – was the last arrival, on December 19th. She was rebuilt during the winter, to leave her bones in Weller's Bay. Some of her timbers were brought to Toronto last November, 53 years to a day after her wreck.

In 1880 the first arrival was the appropriately named schooner *Surprise*, on March 3rd, almost a record. The schooner I of Colborne, commemorating one of the daughters of the Keeler family, was last in, on December 4th.

Capt. Maurice Fitzgerald, of Oakville, brought his new schooner *Marcia A. Hall* into port on April 2nd, 1881, and the *Defiance* – already an old-timer, for she was built in the Etobicoke in 1845 – closed navigation on December 19th. Her defiance applied equally to the frost king and father time, but she was given her name to signalize the triumph of her builder, “Boss” Harris, of Port Credit, over the farmers, who claimed the mouth of the Etobicoke as private property. He built his schooner there and proved it, for the time, to be a “port.”

Another venerable antique, the stonehooker barque *Swallow*, built in 1841 to carry sand for the site of the old jail at the foot of Berkeley street, established an all-time record in 1882 by arriving with a load of cordwood on Feb. 27th. The barque *Swallow* survived up to the days of the Cobourg harbor work of 1910. The 1882 season was closed by the stonehooker *Betsy* on Dec. 6th.

For 1883 the schooner *Ploughboy* opened the port on April 12th and on Dec. 15th the then new *Highland Beauty*, whose lovely name and memory brought a cheque to the firemen's widows and orphans fund only last week, closed the year. The *Highland Beauty* had been intended for a steam yacht, but was finished as a schooner and traded here for twenty years.

The little schooner *Minnie* of St. Catharines, a tiny standing-keeler, was the first arrival both in 1884 and 1885. Those must have been hard winters, for she came in each time as April was going out. The barque *Swallow* traded right up to the end of the year, arriving Dec. 31st, 1885.

Again the *Lone Star* was first in for 1886, arriving March 24th. The *Marion L. Breck*, well-known Kingston schooner, was last in on Dec. 14th.

Another stonehooker *Minnie*, hailing from Toronto, opened navigation April 18th, 1887, and the *Defiance* closed it Dec. 19th.

Maud S. was the great trotter of the time, and Aaron Walker's new stonehooker, named after her, was the first arrival of 1888, on April 7th.

The barque *Swallow* brought in the last cargo on Dec. 21st, the shortest day of the year.

Capt. John Miller's big scow *Morning Star* arrived on March 23rd, 1889, and the Port Union scow *Una*, another stonehooker, closed the season, arriving Jan. 6th, 1890. The *Una* was a late runner, for she closed navigation the following season on Dec. 23rd. The first arrival that year, 1890, not counting the *Una*, was the Port Credit stonehooker *White Oak*, called after the famous Oakville schooner of that name. She came in on the 4th of March.

In 1891 the stonehooker *Coral*, no longer new, was the first arrival, March 24th. The schooner *Brothers*, a hooker larger than the *Coral*, almost ran the year out, arriving with her last load on Dec. 28th,

The hat was taken by the little White Oak again on March 29th, 1892.

The large hooker *Flora*, rebuilt from Capt. Palmateer's scow *Flying Scud* of Picton, was the last to arrive, on Dec. 22nd. She was lost two seasons later, going into Oakville.

In 1893 the stonehooker *Lillian* arrived on April 4th, and the persistent *Coral* finished the season on Dec. 8th. She also opened the next season, again arriving with a cargo on the 17th March, 1894. Capt. George Blowers, nicknamed Samson who had her then, was a hard driver, working early and late.

The tail-ender of the season arrived Dec. 26th, the day after Christmas. This was the scow-built steam barge *Gordon Jerry*, originally rigged as a sailing brigantine and named the *Grace Amelia*. She was the first of the stonehookers to try steam. It was not a success in that trade.

"Samson" Blowers, by the way, was the first of the stonehookers to see the possibilities of the gasoline auxiliary engine. He installed one in the *Lillian*, ten years after this time, and in the last days of the trade they nearly all had a one-lung cougher.

The *Lillian* was the first arrival in 1895, on April 15th. She, by the way, was the last surviving stonehooker, and was a boys' training vessel in Burlington Bay up to a few years ago. She was built in Henderson Bay, N.Y., in 1859. A steamer closed the 1895 season, the *Arabian*, arriving Dec. 9th.

The *Zebra*, smallest hooker except the *Minnie* of St. Catharines, opened navigation here on April 8th, 1896, and the schooner *S. and J. Collier* closed it on Dec. 14th.

Hitherto the sailing craft had had it all their own way with the Harbor Master's Hat or the cash the honor carried – a modest \$3 – but in 1897 the supremacy of the steamship, long threatening, asserted itself. For three years in succession the passenger steamer *Lakeside*, with Capt. Nelson Wigle in the pilot house, was the first arrival, in March, and in the next year the steam-barge *St. Joseph* captured the honor.

The sailors tried to come back, and present century the barque *Swallow* scored once and the *Madeline* once, and the *Maple Leaf* twice. She was the last sailing vessel to open navigation here, performing the feat on March 31st, 1909.

But the honor fell with increasing frequency on the steamers, either the *Lakeside* or *Macassa* or, in later years, the *Dalhousie City* or the sand dredgers, *Charles Dick* or *Sandland*, or the collier *Coalhaven*.

The reason for the sailing vessels ceasing to be the early birds was that they were ceasing to sail altogether. The old *Defiance* kept going until 1917, when she went down off the Highlands. Her master was bitterly disappointed when he brought her into port on Jan. 5th, 1898, with a load of lake-shore building stone frozen to her decks, and was told she was not the first arrival of 1898, but the last arrival of 1897.

Lake sailing vessels disappeared from Toronto harbor with the sale of the *North West*, last of the fleet, in 1928. We cannot count the *Lyman M. Davis*, lately burned at Sunnyside, for it was years since she had spread her wings here.

But we still have the *Bluenose*, and a fine sight she is.

### **Seventy Years A Marine Engineer**

Charles LaVallee, 298 Lumsden ave., has retired from active service.

“Boy-and-man” he spent 70 of his 86 years in marine engine rooms, and was chief of many Great Lakes steamers. He was in charge of the engines of his father's small steamer *Young Canadian* when he was twelve years old, and the *Young Canadian* was chartered to carry H.R.H. Prince of Wales when he visited Toronto in 1860. The Prince, later Edward VII, commended young LaVallee for his skill, presented him with a decoration and adjured him to be “a good engineer.”

#### **Mariner and Builder Too**

Capt. D. P. LaVallee, master mariner, father of Chas. LaVallee. of Toronto, built the Great Lakes steamers *Young America* and *Ontario*, the tug *Hero*, the schooner *Undine*, the yacht *Seagull* and the Windsor car ferries of the Great Western Railway. He was born at Berthier, Quebec, in 1825 and earned his first dollar working in a shipyard. He died at Hamilton, Ont., in 1886.